EASTER MEDITATION

THE STORY IS TOLD OF A MAN WHO STOOD AND LOOKED AT THE MAJESTIC BEAUTY OF THE GRAND CANYON FOR THE FIRST TIME AND EXCLAIMED "SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED HERE." NO WORDS ARE MORE FITTING ON EASTER MORNING. AS WE SURVEY THE EVENTS SURROUNDING JESUS' CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH, AS WE PONDER THE ALMOST MIRACULOUS CHANGE THAT CAME OVER THE FORLORN AND DEJECTED DISCIPLES, AS WE LOOK BACK OVER THE CENTURIES AND SEE THE CONTINOUS HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, OR AS WE MERELY CONTEMPLATE CHRISTIANITY TODAY, THE MILLIONS WHO AT THIS VERY MOMENT ARE OBSERVING EASTER WITH US, THERE ARE NO MORE APPROPRIATE WORDS THAN "SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED HERE!"

THE DISCIPLES WERE CRUSHED, THEIR MASTER HAD DIED. EVEN THOUGH HE HAD TOLD THEM MANY TIMES THAT HIS END WAS NEAR, THEY STILL COULD NOT BELIEVE OR UNDERSTAND. THEIR AGONY WAS INCREASED BY THE UGLY FACT THAT THEY EACH ONE, AND AS A GROUP HAD MISERABLY FAILED. ONE OF THEIR OWN NUMBER, ONE WHO HAD BEEN WITH THEM CONSTANTLY OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS, WITH THE MASTER, HAD BETRAYED HIM TO THE AUTHORITIES. ANOTHER OF THEIR NUMBER, PETER, HAD FOLLOWED HIM ONLY TO DENY THAT HE EVEN KNEW HIM WHEN HE WAS QUESTIONED. AS FOR THE OTHER TEN THEY HAD FLED IMMEDIATELY AT THE TIME OF THE ARREST. NO DOUBT THEY MOURNED THE DEATH OF THEIR LORD BUT TWO OTHER EMOTIONS BOTHERED THEM ALSO. FEAR AND DOUBT. FEAR THAT THEY WOULD SUFFER THE SAME FATE AS HE HAD BECAUSE THEY WERE KNOWN TO BE HIS FOLLOWERS. BUT ABOVE ALL ELSE THEY COULD NOT ESCAPE THE GNAWING DOUBT THAT FILLED THEIR HEARTS. HAD THEY DEVOTED THEIR LIVES TO A LOSING CAUSE? HAD THEY

BEEN TAKEN IN BY A GOOD SALESMAN? AND THEN MARY MAGDALENE HAD RUSHED IN, PANTING AND OUT OF BREATH. SHE TALKED SO FAST AND WAS SO EXCITED THAT THEY BARELY UNDERSTOOD HER. IT SEEMED LIKE SHE AND A FEW OF HER FRIENDS HAD GONE TO THE TOMB JUST BEFORE DAWN TO PERFORM THE PROPER NICETIES OVER THE BODY OF A LOVED ONE. BUT WHEN THEY ARRIVED THEY DISCOVERED THAT THE GREAT BOULDER THAT HAD BEEN PLACED IN THE MOUTH OF THE TOMB HAD BEEN ROLLED AWAY. WHAT WAS IT,? SHE WANTED TO KNOW? HAD THEY TAKEN HIS BODY.? SUDDENLY PETER AND JOHN REMEMBERED HOW HE HAD PROMISED "AND AFTER THREE DAYS THE SON OF MAN WILL RISE AGAIN." IT HAD JUST SOUNDED LIKE A STORY WHEN HE HAD SAID IT, BUT THIS WAS IT. IT HAD BEEN THREE DAYS SINCE HIS DEATH. WITHOUT A WORD PETER RUSHED OUT OF THE DOOR WITH JOHN BEHIND HIM. JOHN, BEING THE YOUNGER, ARRIVED AT THE TOMB FIRST BUT HESITATED PEERING IN THROUGH THE STILLNESS. BUT NOT PETER, HE HAD SUFFERED THE HEARTBREAK OF DENYING HIS LORD, NEVER WOULD HE HESITATE AGAIN. HE BRUSHED PAST JOHN AND BURST INTO THE OPENED TOMB. YES, ~~HE WAS RIGHT~~ JESUS WAS GONE, BUT LOOK, THE LINENS WERE FOLDED NEATLY AND LOOKED UNTOUCHED. NO ONE HAD STOLEN THE BODY. HE HAD RISEN. PERHAPS OF ALL THOSE WHO SHARED THE GLORIOUS NEWS PETER WAS MOST HAPPY. HE HAD FAILED HIS LORD, BUT NOW, NOW HE WOULD HAVE ANOTHER CHANCE. [AS WE WELL KNOW PETER NEVER FAILED AGAIN.]

MARY MAGDALENE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENED. JESUS HAD NEVER MENTIONED DEATH OR RESURRECTION TO HER, HE WAS JUST A GOOD FRIEND. AND SO SHE WENT BACK TO THE GARDEN

TO SEARCH AGAIN FOR THE BODY. THIS TIME SHE FOUND HIM, NOT IN A TOMB/ A DEAD MAN, AMONG THE DEAD./ BUT ALIVE, STANDING BEHIND HER SAYING MERELY,/MARY. THEN SHE KNEW TOO, HE WAS NOT ONLY A DEAR FRIEND AND TEACHER BUT HER REDEEMER AND LORD.

THE MOST IMPORTANT CHRISTIAN SYMBOL IS THE EMPTY TOMB: IF WE TRY TO PUSH THROUGH ALL DOCTRINE AND BELIEFS WE CANNOT AVOID THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST. IT IS AT ONCE THE BEGINNING PLACE AND THE END OF OUR FAITH,/ IT MAKES EVERYTHING ELSE REAL AND UNDER* STANDABLE. IT MAKES THE LIFE OF JESUS MORE THAN THAT OF A GOOD MAN/ IT MAKES HIS CRUCIFIXION MORE THAN AN UNJUST MISTAKE. IT TESTIFIES THAT HE WAS LORD, THE WORD MADE FELSH, OUR REDEEMER AND SAVIOR. WHAT HAPPENED THAT EARLY MORNING ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT SINGLE EVENT FOR THE LIVES OF MOST OF US. THE EVENT WAS SO IMPORTANT TO THE EARLY CHRISTIANS THAT THEY, DEVOUT JEWS, CHANGED THEIR TRADITIONAL TIME OF WORSHIP FROM THE SABBATH TO THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK. IF WE WERE ASKED WHY WE GO TO CHURCH ON SUNDAY/THE ANSWER IS NOT THAT WE WANT TO START THE WEEK RIGHT, OR THAT THE STORES ARE CLOSED THAT DAY,/THE WHOLE REASON IS THAT THIS IS THE DAY ON WHICH JESUS CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD. EACH SUNDAY WE MEET HERE TO WORSHIP WE ARE ESSENTAILLY ABOUT THE SAME BUSINESS,- CELEBRATING THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN? FIFTY ONE SUNDAYS OF THE YEAR WE STRUGGLE WITH ITS MEANING,: AS THE BASIS OF OUR FAITH-THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL TO EVERY CHRISTIAN

SERMON. AND YET IT IS TEMPTING TO TRY TO SUM IT ALL UP THIS MORNING TO MEET THE OCCASION. OF COURSE THIS IS AN IMPOSSIBILITY, BUT LET US LOOK AT TWO ASPECTS OF ITS MEANING.

FIRSTLY THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST IS THE PROOF THAT GOOD HAS DEFEATED EVIL: THAT LIFE HAS CONQUERED SIN AND DEATH. THIS WAS THE SUBJECT FOR WEDNESDAY'S SERMON BUT IT IS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO BE REMENTIONED.

AS CHRISTIANS ~~XXX~~ OUR VIEW OF THE WORLD, OR PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE RECOGNIZES TWO REALMS. GOOD AND EVIL. THE POTENTIAL FOR BOTH GOOD AND EVIL IS PRESENT IN THE WORLD AND IN EACH ONE OF US. SINCE GOOD AND EVIL ARE POLAR OPPOSITES THERE IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY. ON EASTER MORNING WE SEE THAT GOOD CAN WIN THAT STURGGLE. JESUS CHRIST WAS GOODNESS, PERFECTION AND IN HIS CURCIFIXION WE WATCH THE STRUGGLE AS HE FACED EVIL AND DEATH, EVIL CRUCIFIED HIM AND DEATH CLAIMED HIS LIFE BUT HE IS RISEN. HE HAS WON THE VICTORY AND WE NEED NOT FEAR, HE PAID THE ULTIMATE PRICE BUT IN SO DOING PROVED TO US AS CLEARLY AS POSSIBLE THAT THE VICTORY CAN BE OURS.

FROM DEATH HE TOOK THE STING. DEATH HAS ALWAYS BEEN SHROUDED WITH MYSTERY AND FEAR, MEN HAVE ALWAYS LOATHED THE THOUGHT OF THE NOTHINGNESS OF DEATH. JESUS CHRIST DIED WILLINGLY TO PROVE THAT DEATH IS NOT FINAL, THAT LIFE IS MORE POWERFUL THAN DEATH AND CAN NEVER BE QUENCHED.

THE SECOND MOTIF OF THE RESURRECTION THAT WE MUST THINK ABOUT IS EXPRESSED IN THE

NAME OF OUR ANTHEM THIS MORNING - "HE LIVES."

MARY WENT TO THE GARDEN THAT MORNING TO LOOK FOR HER LORD IN A TOMB, SHE LOOKED FOR JESUS AMONG THE DEAD AND SHE COULD NOT FIND HIM. HE WAS NOT THERE, HE WAS NOT DEAD, HE WAS RISEN, HE LIVES. WE DO WELL TO REMEMBER MARY'S EXPERIENCE IN THE GARDEN.

PERHAPS WE TOO LOOK FOR JESUS CHRIST AMONG THE DEAD. ALL TOO FREQUENTLY WE CONTAIN HIM AND OUR FAITH IN LONG FACED PIETY, WE OFTEN THINK OF JESUS RESIDING ONLY IN THE SOBER DEACON, OR THE REVENT MINISTER, OR IN THE SOLEMNITY OF CHURCH RITUAL, BUT HE LIVES. THE JOY OF EASTER MORNING IS THAT OUR SAVIOR LIVES, HE MAY BE FOUND AMONG THE LIVING, IN THE HAPPINESS WE FIND IN EVERY DAY LIFE, IN THE LAUGHTER OF CHILDREN, IN THE BEAUTY OF LOVE. ALTHOUGH WE SOMETIMES OUT-DO OURSELVES WITH EASTER FLOWERS, THE NEWNESS THAT IS CHARACTERISTIC OF SPRING TIME TESTIFIES TO AND IS OUR SYMBOL OF A RESURRECTION IN JESUS CHRIST AND IN OURSELVES.

INSIDE EVERYONE OF US RESIDES THE POTENTIAL FOR GOOD,-THE SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST PLANTED THERE BY GOD. AND JUST AS THE CHRIST BURST FROM THE GRAVE SO THAT FRESHNESS IN US YEARNS TO BURST FORTH AND BECOME AN OPERATING FORCE IN OUR LIVES. ON EASTER MORNING WE MUST EXAMINE OURSELVES AND SEE WHETHER WE HAVE ALLOWED JESUS CHRIST TO BE RESURRECTED AND TO LIVE IN OUR LIVES. OR HAVE WE ALLOWED HIM TO REMAIN BURIED THERE? HAVE WE ROLLED THE STONE SECURELY BACK IN PLACE FOREVER FORBIDING HIM TO ALTER OUR LIVES.

EASTER MORNING TELLS OF A NEWNESS, A NEWNESS THAT OCCURRED AS CHRIST AROSE FROM THE GRAVE AND A NEWNESS THAT CAN OCCUR IN EACH ONE OF US. WE CAN GRASP THIS NEWNESS AND FEEL OURSELVES SO CHANGED THAT IT MAY BE SAID WE HAVE FOUND NEW LIFE. EASTER MORNING TELLS OF A LIGHT SHINING IN THE DARKNESS, A LIGHT THAT WILL NOT GO OUT. WE MUST DECIDE WHETHER WE WILL ALLOW THAT LIGHT TO SHINE INTO OUR LIVES, OR WHETHER WE WILL TURN OUR BACKS FACING INTO THE DARKNESS.

JESUS CHRIST IS BURIED IN THE HEARTS OF EVERY ONE OF US,. THE PLEA OF EASTER MORNING IS TO LET HIM LIVE, TO LET HIM SO INFLUENCE AND CHANGE OUR LIVES THAT WE CAN SAY WITH PAUL, "IT IS NO LONGER I THAT LIVE, BUT CHRIST WHO LIVES IN ME."

THERE IS NO SUCH TING AS AN EASTER FAITH. FOR SOME REASON IT HAS BECOME A CHRISTIAN CUSTOM TO ATTEND CHURCH ON EASTER AND CHRISTMAS AND TO LET THE REST OF THE YEAR SLIDE BY. I DON'T KNOW WHETHER THIS IS THE CASE WITH ANYONE HERE TODAY OR NOT AND I DON'T INTEND TO MAKE YOU FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE BY ACCUSATIONS. BUT THE JOYOUS EASTER WORDS "HE IS RISEN" ARE NOT CONFINED TO ONE HOUR OF ONE DAY IN THE YEAR. JESUS CHRIST IS RISEN TODAY, TOMORROW, NEXT SUNDAY AND THE SUNDARY AFTER THAT AND THROUGHOUT EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR. THE CHOIR'S AFFIRMATION THAT "HE LIVES" APPLIES TO EVERY MINUTE OF EVERY DAY. IN THIS, EASTER MORNING PRESENTS A CHALLENGE. DOES HE LIVE IN YOUR LIFE EVERYDAY OR JUST ON EASTER.? DOES A RISEN SAVIOR MEAN SOMETHING TO YOU ALWAYS OR JUST ON THE OCCASIONS OF

CHURCH ATTENDENCE.?

EASTER MORNING TRULY REPRESENTS THE MOST JOYOUS AND GLORIOUS OCCASION IN THE CHRISTIAN YEAR, BUT ESSENTIALLY IT IS NO MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY OTHER SUNDAY. IF WE TRULY MEAN THE WORDS "HE LIVES" OUR FAITH MUST GO DEEP INSIDE EACH ONE OF US, IT MUST ACCOMPANY US EVERYWHERE WE GO AND IN ALL THAT WE DO.

A RISEN SAVIOR STANDS BEHIND US ALWAYS, AS HE DID HTAT MORNING WITH MARY: AND HE CALLS US BY NAME. OUR CHALLENGE IS TO RECOGNIZE HIM, NOT ONLY THIS MORNING, BUT ALWAYS - FOREVER.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN EASTER FAITH. THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD IS SURELY THE SOURCE OF OUR FAITH, BUT IT ALSO RUNS IN AND THROUGH EVERYTHING WE DO AS CHRISTIANS LET US BE JOYFUL AND GLAD ON THIS DAY, LET OUR VOICES RING LOUDLY WITH HALLEJUH'S BUT LET US ALSO PLEDGE TO EXTEND THE GLAD TIDINGS OF THE DAY THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. [MAY WE CARRY ON OUR LIPS AND IN OUR MINDS, FROM HOUR TO HOUR AND DAY TO DAY THE WORDS THAT RANG SO CLEARLY LONG AGO, AND THAT ARE SO RELEVANT TO US TODAY. "HE IS NOT HERE--HE IS RISEN."]